

Learning by Ear – Religious Dialogue: “A Bridge over Gori”

Episode 05: “Hot Debate”

Author: Romie Singh

Editors: Katrin Ogunsade, Naïma Guira

Proof reading: Natalie Glanville-Wallis

Expert on African religions: Jean-Félix Belinga Belinga

List of characters for episode 5:

- Narrator /Philip, male (17)
- Harry, male (17)
- Mat, male (16)
- Layla, female (16)
- Roshi, female (16)
- School director, Mrs Milulu, female (48)
- Father Barnabus Dembele, Harry’s uncle (49)
- Philip’s father, Layton-Brown (50)
- Hassan, Layla’s brother (12)
- + Students in the background

1. SIG TUNE UP

2. INTRO:

Welcome to Learning by Ear and Episode 5 of our 10 part radio drama series "A Bridge over Gori", which tells the dramatic story of how religion and politics drive a wedge between two communities and two families...

Today is the opening of the much awaited Debating Club at Ubuntu College. Excitement is in the air. But some shocking news creates confusion and sadness, especially in the new romance between our young heroes, Harry and Layla. Philip tells you the whole story: he is one of Harry's best friends. Listen in and find out more!

Scene 1. At Ubuntu College

Director Milulu, Philip narrator, students in the background

**3. SFX: Morning Assembly. Students and teachers sing Ubuntu Anthem
(ending)**

4. DIRECTOR: Good morning everyone and welcome to our morning assembly.

5. ALL: Good morning, Mrs Milulu.

6. DIRECTOR: As you know, our college takes its name from an old African concept, Ubuntu. Ubuntu is about compassion, sharing, taking care and protecting each other. To remind us of our philosophy of tolerance and respect, let us read a prayer. I will not tell you if it is African, American, Muslim or Christian. If it touches you, then that is what counts.

7. STUDENTS+DIRECTOR (reading prayer):

Oh, Great Spirit,
whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me.
I need your strength and wisdom.

I seek strength, not to be superior to my brother,
but to fight my greatest enemy - myself.
Make me always ready to come to you
with clean hands and straight eyes,
so when life fades,
my spirit will come to you
without shame.

8. SFX: Murmur of students clearly moved

9. DIRECTOR: Did that prayer touch you?

10. SFX: All murmur in approval.

11. DIRECTOR: It was spoken by a Native American – Chief Yellow Lark in 1887.

12. SFX: All murmur in approval

13. DIRECTOR: Now more than ever it is important to build bridges. We should accept each other as human beings first and not as representatives of a religion. Therefore the rule that there should be no wearing of religious symbols in school remains. This has included the wearing of religious clothing too. However, our Muslim students have told us they must wear long sleeves and trousers and cover their heads if they want to take part in sports outside school where the general public is watching. And they say they do want to take part. Therefore we must try and find a solution. I will bring up the topic of appropriate sportswear at our next school governors' meeting.

14. SFX: Murmur of approval among students

15. DIRECTOR: Also, the new debating club opens this afternoon at 3pm. Please go and find out what the first topic will be! I say no more! I wish you a positive and peaceful day.

AMBIENCE FADE OUT

16. PHILIP/NARRATOR: How positive could my day be? I felt Layla didn't even see me. I went to the debating club just to be near her. But in her eyes, I was just another face in the crowd.

Scene 2. At the Debating Club

Harry, Layla, Mat, Philip, Roshi, groups of boys and girls

17. SFX: Students in classroom. Excited chatter (fade out)

18. HARRY: Good afternoon. I'm really pleased to see so many of you present at the opening of our Debating Club. Our chairperson is Layla and she will say a few words first.

19. LAYLA: Thank you, Harry. The Director has very kindly let us use this room for 45 minutes. We are supposed to have some ground rules so I would like you all to suggest some and I'll write them up!

20. **MAT:** Punctuality!

21. **PHILIP:** Respect each other's opinion!

22. **SFX: Cell phone rings**

23. **ROSHI:** Cell phones off! **(laughter)**

24. **LAYLA:** Right. And please raise your hand to speak: no interrupting. The first topic most of you chose in our poll is polygamy. To kick off the discussion let me ask: What do we know about polygamy? Yes, Roshi?

25. **ROSHI:** It's a custom that belongs to a patriarchal society where men dominate - it allows them to have more than one wife! But women are not allowed more than one husband. According to the United Nations Human Rights Charter, we are all supposed to be equal.

26. **MAT:** Equal to what? To copy men? That doesn't make sense.

27. **ROSHI:** You're right, Mat! So why are men allowed?

28. **MAT:** It's a custom, Roshi. People have practised polygamy for hundreds of years, probably as a way of guaranteeing a lot of children.
29. **LAYLA:** **(raising her voice)** Please put your hands up to speak. Um..Yes, Philip?
30. **PHILIP:** I understand that polygamy is a sort of life insurance for the older parents, so that they have family to take care of them.
31. **MAT:** Right! And also as farmers, so that they have enough hands to help with the land and cattle. You can't ask why.
32. **ROSHI:** Oh yes, I can! **(laughter)** This is a debating club!
33. **SFX: General laughing and clapping specially from the girls**
34. **GIRLS:** Go Roshi!
35. **LAYLA:** Please ...shhh. I would like to ask: How does gender equality fit in with the practice of polygamy?
36. **ROSHI:** It doesn't!

37. SFX: Girls roar approval. Noisy exchanges

38. LAYLA: (shouting above the noise) OK. OK. Order! That's one point. Are there any others?

39. MAT: (still shouting) Well, Muslims practise polygamy.

(In quick succession:)

40. LAYLA: My dad doesn't.

41. ROSHI: My dad doesn't either.

42. MAT: OK. OK. Only **some** Muslim men practise polygamy.

43. ROSHI: **And** some Christians. It happens everywhere: In the USA, in Europe, not just in Africa. They just call it having a mistress, or an affair.

44. SFX: Noisy disagreement/agreement

45. HARRY: Quiet! Order please.

46. SFX: People say shhh

47. HARRY: As one of the moderators here, I would like to draw a distinction between polygamy and having a mistress or affairs outside marriage. They are very different things.

48. Room goes quiet.

49. HARRY: A man with two or more wives in an African setup must first get the permission of the first wife. He must be responsible for her, build her a home. It's quite different from having a mistress or having an affair. An affair is a second relationship which the man or woman hides from his or her official partner. Polygamy is different; the presence of new relationships is controlled.

50. ROSHI: Yes! Controlled by the man!

51. SFX: UPROAR AGAIN. FADE on voices/ clapping and disagreement from the students

52. LAYLA: Shh – quiet... As a Debating Club, we need one statement that has two clear sides. So I ask: Does this House uphold the traditional African custom of polygamy as an acceptable part of modern African culture?

53. ROSHI: No! It is UNACCEPTABLE! The point is, men don't want to feel the pain of their wife choosing another man – and the wife feels pain, believe me, seeing the man she married with another woman!

54. SFX: More noise and disagreement

AMBIENCE FADE UNDER

55. PHILIP/NARRATOR: I could relate to what Roshi said. I was feeling it. After the debate, I hovered in the corridor to talk to Layla. But she and Harry were deep in conversation. I decided to go to her house and wait. Surely she would come soon. But she didn't. All I saw was her brother going out clutching what seemed to be a bottle. I gave up and went home after meeting up with friends at Reunion Café. When I opened the door I found my father in a very excited state.

Scene 3. At the Layton-Browne's

Layton-Browne, Philip

FADE IN P's FATHER: Talking fast on the telephone

56. P'FATHER: Yes, change the headline. Change it! It must read:
"Another church burns". Got it?

57. SFX: banging telephone receiver

58. P's FATHER: Ah hallo, Philip. Exciting times!

59. PHILIP: Why? What's happened Dad?

60. P'S FATHER: Hah! You're talking to Me! Your father– Layton with an 'a' and Browne with an 'e' ! I have the biggest scoop! The Gori Tribune will be the first to break the news in the morning papers with the names of the real culprits behind the fire.

61. PHILIP: What fire?

62. P's FATHER: At St Thomas's Church. Look - our journalist took a photo of this kid before he was taken away in the ambulance.

63. **PHILIP:** A photo? Show me!

64. **SFX: Mouse click (showing photo on laptop)**

65. **P's FATHER:** You recognise him, don't you? So do I! I must let
Father Barnabus know who burnt down his church!

66. **SFX: Phone dialling and ringing then fade out**

67. **PHILIP/NARRATOR:** My father picked up the phone and called Harry's
uncle, Father Barnabus. I stood there rooted to the
spot. The photo left no doubt. It was his hair and T-
shirt.

Scene 4. At Harry's home

Father Barnabus, Harry

FADE IN CONVERSATION

68. **FATHER B:** **(agitated. On the phone)** What? I see. Thank you for
telling me.

69. **SFX: Hanging up telephone**

70. **HARRY:** **(nervous)** What is it, uncle?

71. FATHER B: **(furious)** Aha- Harry! I have forbidden you to see Layla Omer after school. Do you want to know why? Do you? Well, someone just tried to set fire to our church on Main Street. And do you want to know who is behind it? Her brother, Hassan Omer! - while **you** were flirting with his sister.

72. HARRY: What? Hassan?

73. FATHER B: Layton-Browne **(mocking)** - Layton with an 'a' and Browne with an 'e' - from the Gori Tribune has a photograph of that boy, Hassan. Oh! Those Omers! We can't let them get away with it. And now you, you obey **me!** No more going out with that Muslim girl after school, is that clear Harry? **No more!**

74. SIG TUNE UP

75. OUTRO:

And that's all from *Learning by Ear* for today! The tension between Muslims and Christians in Gori is high after the burning of Father Barnabus' church. Please join us for Episode 6 of our radio drama "A Bridge over Gori", and find out how Harry tries to ease the situation.

And remember, if you want to hear the programme again or tell friends about it, please visit our website at [www dot d w – world dot d e slash lbe](http://www.worldde.lbe). Goodbye for now!

END OF EPISODE 5